

VZCZCXRO2858
PP RUEHBI RUEHCHI RUEHCI RUEHCN
DE RUEHCI #0171/01 1421353
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 221353Z MAY 07
FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1564
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1483
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0656
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0651
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY 0283
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 0167
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0025
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0074
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0113
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0431
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0350
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 1925

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000171

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [IN](#) [BM](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN MILITARY ENGAGING WITH BURMESE COUNTERPARTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During April and May, Senior Indian military officials appear to have undertaken a concerted effort to increase engagement with their Burmese counterparts. Several meetings have taken place both at political and military levels between officials of the two neighboring countries. Reportedly, the Indian Government has promised the Burmese a supply of military hardware, joint training exercises and greater cross border cooperation, especially in cracking down on ethnic militants. While seeking to combat militant groups through military cooperation, according to local contacts, India also is hoping to use the closer relations to temper the perceived growing Chinese influence in Burma. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On May 10, Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sureesh Mehta left on a nine-day visit to Burma to further India's policy of increasing military engagement with their neighbor. Mehta reportedly held talks with top leaders of the Burma government on bilateral military cooperation. During April 1-5, Burma Navy Chief Vice-Admiral Soe Thane had visited Delhi and Indian naval establishments on a goodwill tour. Thane, met Indian Defense Minister A.K. Antony and Mehta, and is understood to have presented a case for procuring naval hardware from India.

¶3. (SBU) Also, following the visits of Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee in January and by Home Secretary V.K. Duggal in February to Burma, an 18-member Burmese Army delegation visited Tezpur in Assam on April 26, to attend the Indo-Burma biannual meeting. The Burma delegation led by Brig. Gen. Tin Maung Ohn interacted with senior Indian Army officers and called on the General Officer Commanding of 4 Corp Lt. Gen. R.K. Chhabra to discuss various issues including cross border insurgency, smuggling and border management. The Burma delegation also visited Rangapahar in Nagaland and Eastern Command headquarters in Kolkata between April 23 and 25.

¶4. (SBU) In Tezpur, the Indian Army officers reiterated the need for the Burmese Army to cooperate in flushing out Northeast-based Indian insurgents, who are holed-up in the jungles of western Burma, such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Kaplang faction (NSCN-K). In return, the Burmese Army delegation requested technical assistance from the Indian Army. At the meeting in Rangapahar, Nagaland, Indian Army reportedly

agreed to train a Burmese Army team in the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Vairengte, Mizoram, in return for Burmese cooperation to root out Indian insurgents from its soil.

¶5. (SBU) Issues like drug trafficking and effective border management figured high on the agenda particularly in the wake of violence unleashed by Indian separatist ULFA militants in parts of the northeastern state of Assam. The Indian Army has always maintained that ULFA and NSCN-K have bases in Burma, and New Delhi has been demanding a crackdown on the insurgent groups operating from Burma -- similar to the 2003 Bhutan Army operation against ULFA. Other insurgent groups operating from across the border include the United Nationalist Liberation Front (UNLF) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

¶6. (SBU) Media reported that in a separate visit to Delhi on April 24, the Burmese Army's Quartermaster General, Thiha Thura and Lt.Gen. Tin Aung Myint Oo, arrived with a military "shopping list" and met Indian counterparts Lt. Gen. Sudhir Sharma and Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Deepak Kapoor. Gen. Tin Aung Myint Oo, who supervises all military supplies to Burma's armed forces, during the meeting presented the Indian Army brass a list of military hardware that Burma wants India to supply. The Government of India (GOI) reportedly has approved the transfer of some military hardware, including 105 mm howitzers, mortars, grenade launchers and possibly T-55 tanks. India is also sending two Islander surveillance aircraft that have been decommissioned by the Navy.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: GOI appears to be significantly stepping-up its military engagement with the Burmese junta as evidenced by the number and level of the various bilateral interactions. GOI is partly motivated by the presence of Indian militants operating out of Burma and the increase in ULFA's violent activities since October 2006, following a failed ceasefire.

KOLKATA 00000171 002 OF 002

Another motivating factor, as expressed by local contacts to Post, appears to be the GOI's concern over the perceived growing Chinese influence in the Burma. However, it is unlikely that India can match China's investment and influence in Burma and risks helping to undermine international efforts to isolate Burma for little substantive gain.

¶8. (U) This message was coordinated with AmEmbassies New Delhi and Rangoon.
JARDINE